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ABSTRACT

Support groups for middle school/junior high school students were developed for students identified by school counselors and teachers to be "at risk." To prevent negative labeling, the groups were promoted as groups to help students make good choices. Teachers and counselors were trained in issues and characteristics of children "at risk." The program had four main goals: to prevent substance abuse; to alleviate student truancy; to prevent dropping out; and to refer students with treatment or other needs to appropriate programs. Support groups were designed to teach skills that are not taught in homes with dysfunctional behavior. Support groups were facilitated by prevention personnel from a county agency. Support groups usually met once a week for 60 to 90 minutes. A manual will be available in the 1989-90 school year. The document includes the following: (1) a list of 20 characteristics of "at risk" children; (2) a list of 8 guidelines for support groups; (3) descriptions of 5 roles played in families; (4) a list of 10 good things to know for children of alcoholics; (5) graphs of various family roles; (6) the permission form/letter; and (7) an introduction to the support group manual. (ABL)

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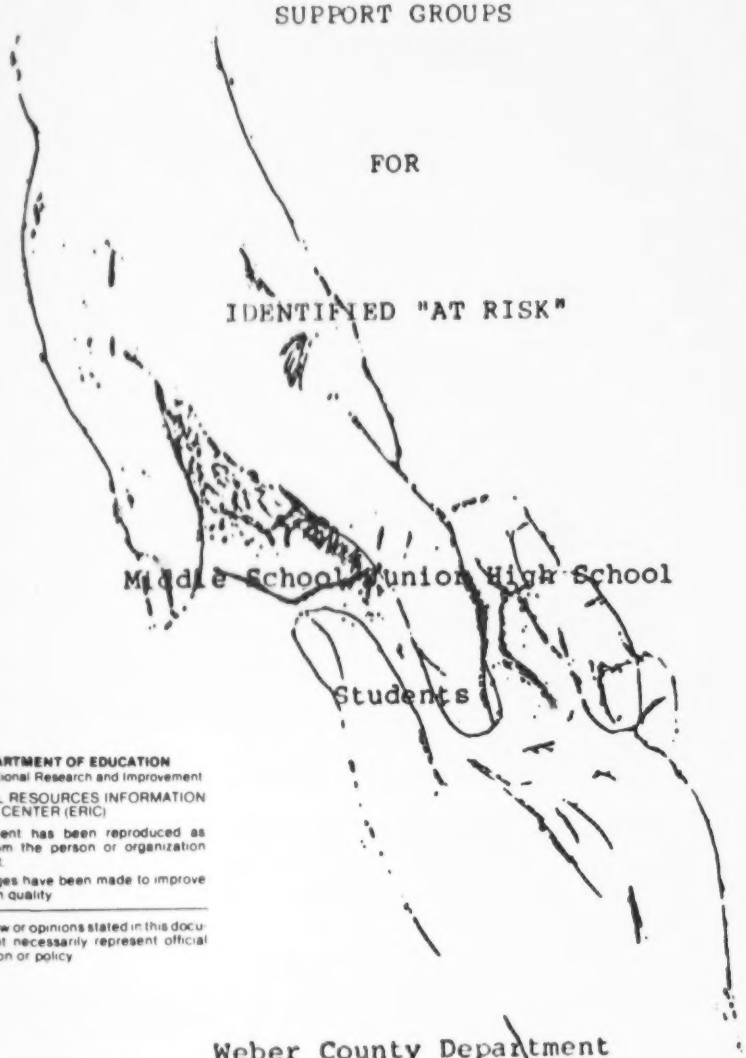
SUPPORT GROUPS

FOR

IDENTIFIED "AT RISK"

Middle School/Junior High School

Students



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Weber County Department
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Zada Haws - Nikki Lovell

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GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORT GROUPS

1. Identify the need.

2. Utilize community or agency resources.

3. Select or recruit students.

4. Select meeting time, place and length.

5. Establish group norms. (Confidentiality, one talk at a time, etc.)

6. Decide on topics and issues to be discussed and materials to be used.

7. Begin Support Group.

8. Evaluate Progress.
   Referrals if needed.

Children Identified "At Risk"

Support Groups in Middle School/Junior High

In 1986 a pilot program for children living in substance abusive homes was started at Bonneville High School. After a year of support groups and awareness programs, it was felt by the school that the objectives and positive outcomes had been met. Following this initial year several more support groups were started in high school. While working in this area, there was an overall feeling that support groups for all at risk students should be started earlier. In 1987-88 one middle/school "at risk student" model project was started. It was so successful several more were requested. We now have 10 support groups in junior/middle schools in two school districts.

Students are identified by school counselors and teachers, and then asked if they would like to join a support group. To prevent negative labeling by students or parents, the groups are promoted as groups to help students make "Good Choices."

Prior to starting groups it was imperative that teachers and counselors were trained in issues and characteristics of children "At Risk." Characteristics are definable and easily recognized once a qualified trainer has presented them.

Note: This is a relatively new area and caution should be given that someone presenting in this area should be up-to-date on information and also have an understanding of school systems.

This program has four main goals.

1. Prevent substance abuse.
2. Alleviate student truancy
3. Prevent Drop-out
4. Refer students with treatment or other needs to appropriate programs.

Support groups for "at risk" students were not started to help students already using and in trouble. Support groups are designed to teach skills that are not taught in homes where a dysfunctional behavior is present.

Support groups are facilitated with prevention personnel from a county agency. Counselor's in the districts have been trained in the support group concept with a strong emphasis on understanding of characteristics of "at risk" students. Students in such groups often do not understand their own behaviors. These children will usually still live in dysfunctional homes. Changing behaviors that have been established in these students may not always be safe for them. When the child of an non-traditional home chooses to change behaviors, a parent may not see the child as becoming healthy.

Example: A high school girl has been cleaning the house and caring for younger brothers and sisters. She learns in group that the behavior is helping to keep her mother sick (drinking). This girl quits doing her mothers work. The result was no care provided for younger siblings and an angry mother who accused her of being a "selfish, self-centered, _____."

This example is also part of an activity in the support group manual. Students are given an opportunity to then discuss, consequences, decisions, resources and then individually talk about what they would do.

The manual was designed as a workbook to be used in support group. At risk students often come from unstructured, inconsistant homes where rules change daily. To start a process of support for this group, it should be what they are not receiving at home as well as an educational process. The manual is still in the pilot stage but will be available upon request school year 1989-90.

Support groups are usually held once a week for one to one and half hours during school. Some schools have met twice a week.

THE CHARACTERISTICS LIST

Children "At Risk":

1. Do not know what a normal, joyful, loving life is like.
2. Have difficulty following projects through from beginning to end.
3. Lie when it would be just as easy to tell the truth.
4. Judge themselves without mercy.
5. Have difficulty letting go, relaxing and having fun.
6. Take themselves very seriously.
7. Have difficulty with intimate relationships.
8. Overreact to changes over which they have no control.
9. Feel different from other people.
10. Constantly seek approval and affirmation.
11. Are either super responsible or super irresponsible.
12. Are extremely loyal, even in the face of evidence that the loyalty was undeserved.
13. Look for immediate as opposed to deferred gratification.
14. Lock ourselves into a course of action without serious consideration to alternative behaviors or possible consequences.
15. Seek tension and crisises and them complain about the result.
16. Avoid conflict or aggravate it; rarely deal with it.
17. Fear rejection and abandonment, yet are rejecting of others.
18. Fear failure, but sabotage their own successes.
19. Fear criticism and judgment, yet criticize and judge others.
20. Have become aware of emotions which seemed to separate them from others and higher powers and are, therefore, afraid and depressed.

These characteristics are often found in children from dysfunctional homes. They can be good skills or bad, they need to be used in the right places.

ROLES PLAYED IN FAMILIES

"THE CARETAKER"

...tends to focus on helping other people feel better. They are motherly in their relationships to other children. This is usually a "liked" child by friends and adults. This child's sensitivity is noticeable.

"THE HERO CHILD" IS...

...always volunteering, very responsible and manifests a drive, almost a complusion, to be on top. These children have an insatiable need for attention and approval and often are class leaders who are parental or bossy in their relationships with other children. They tend to be very disappointed when losing, superior or snobbish when winning, and are frequently labeled "teacher's pet" by other students.

"THE SCAPEGOAT"...

...tends to blame others, makes strong peer alliances, and is often disciplined by teachers or principals for breaking rules. The rebel tend to talk back, neglects work, and can be very frustrating to work with. The typical adult comments are "I don't know what to do with that child," or "I've tried everything!"

"THE LOST CHILD"...

...often gets lost in the shuffle. Teachers and other adults sometimes can't remember the child's name because he or she is so quiet and is seldom a behavior problem. They tend to have few if any friends and like to work alone in school, often in very creative though non-verbal ways. Other students either leave them alone or tend to tease them about never getting involved.

"THE MASCOT"...

...tends to be funny or distracting and gets attention frequently. This child likes to hide, make faces, pull the chair out for someone else, stick chalk in the erasers and otherwise act out.

GOOD THINGS TO KNOW FOR CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS

1. Alcoholism is a disease.

2. It is not your fault. You cannot make someone alcoholic.

3. It is not the alcoholic's fault either. He or she didn't choose to have the disease.

4. Alcoholics can recover from the disease, if they get help from AA or another treatment program.

5. You cannot stop alcoholics from drinking, nor can you force them to get help.

6. You are not alone. Lots of other kids live in families where alcoholism is a problem.

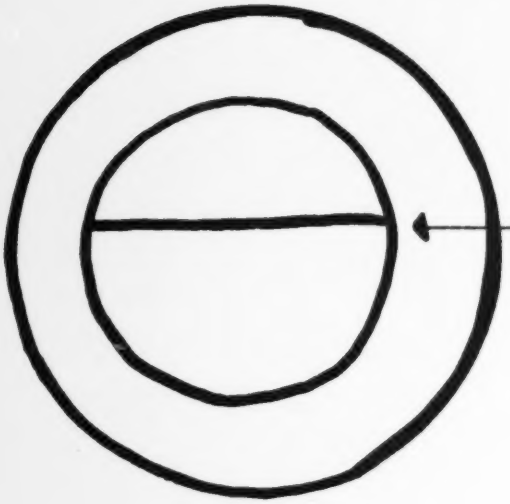
7. You deserve to be helped and you can get help for yourself.

8. There are people who will understand.

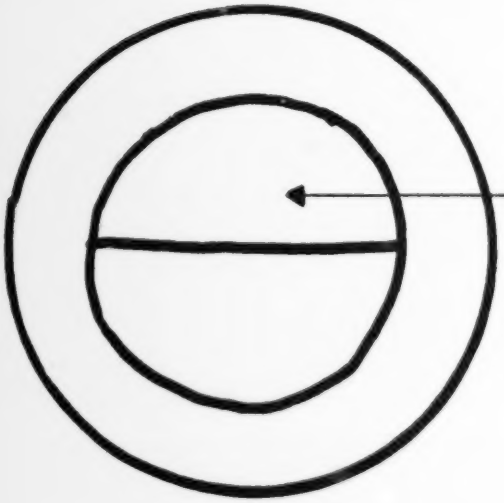
9. You can feel better about yourself.

10. Life can be better for you whether or not your parent stops drinking.

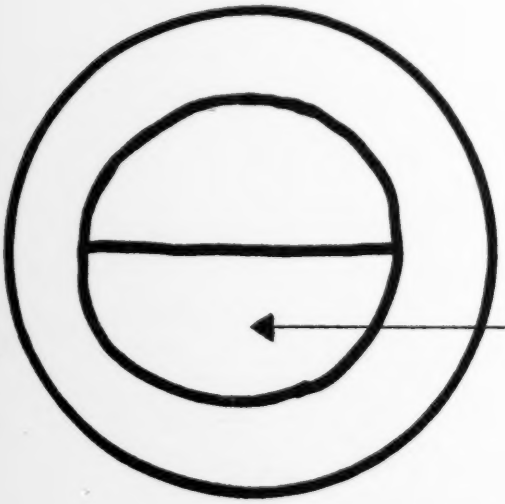
FOR THE FACILITATORS INFORMATION



Outside ring describes the behaviors exibited by the student.



Top half of center circle are descriptions of what they are covering up.



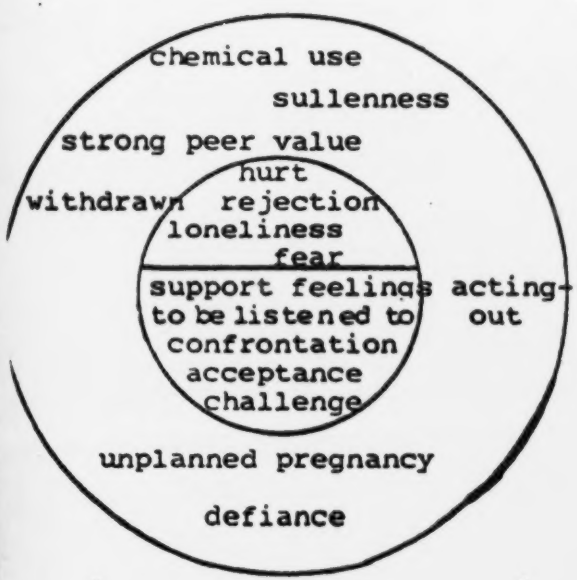
Bottom half are the needed solutions for the student to feel good.

ALCOHOLIC

CHIEF ENABLER

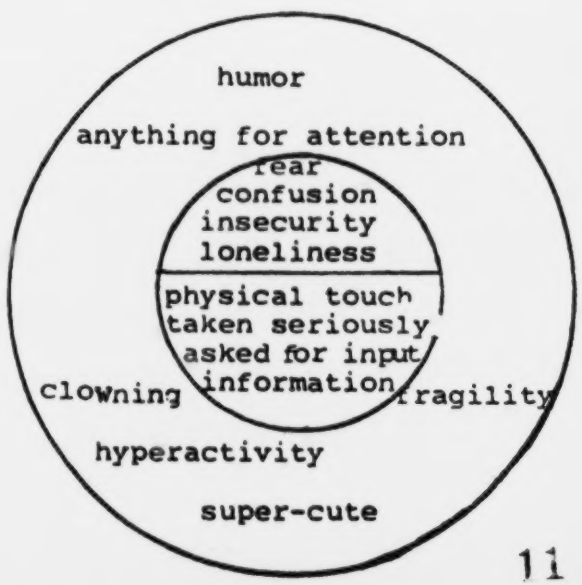
HERO

SCAPEGOAT



LOST CHILD

MASCOT



Example

Ogden City Schools
2444 Adams Ave., Ogden, Utah 84401

Superintendent
James L. West

Asst. Superintendent
Milton Kendrick

Dir. Personnel / Support Services
Allan J. Kap

Business Administrator
Larry L. Tesch

Board of Education
Donna V. Barker
George L. Bell
R. Brent Cherrington
Glen S. Collins
Phyllis D. Shaw

September 21, 1988

Dear Parents,

Again this year, we are pleased to offer a support service at the school to help students make good decisions. Working with other community agencies we are forming a discussion group which will meet twice weekly to help students make good decisions. We will be meeting during 6th period on tuesdays and 7th period on thursdays. The first session will be held on October 4, 1988.

We are extending this opportunity to students on a first-come first-served basis. The discussion group will be led by Mrs. Zada Haws, a long time educator and currently the Educational Resource Center Coordinator, a youth counselor from Weber County Drug and Alcohol, and Mrs. Nicholas, our counselor. Additional guest presentors will be brought in from our local community.

If you are interested in having your child participate in this program please fill out the information below and return the form to Mrs. Nicholas at the school as soon as possible. Only fifteen students will be enrolled in this special program.

In connection with this program we are encouraging parents to enroll in the "Capable People" program which will be offered through community education at different times during the school year. This program is designed to help parents cope with the difficult task of being a good parent.

We hope you will be interested in both of these programs and make plans to participate. If you have any questions about the support group please call Mrs. Nicholas at 625-8870.

Very sincerely,

Vern W. Call, Principal

PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE FORM

Name of student: _____ Grade ___
has my permission to participate in the Group Discussion Program described above.

_____
Parent/Guardian Signature Date

SUPPORT GROUP MANUAL

INTRODUCTION

This manual is designed for students who, for whatever reason, are not feeling good about themselves. This can happen in families where there are no apparent problems, but still the child's needs are not being met. It can happen in homes where the family avoids showing feelings, homes with little nurturing, homes where there are rigid rather than fair and flexible rules, and homes where little time is given to the children. If the home has alcoholism, drug dependence, battering, child abuse, the feelings of not being worthwhile or understood and cared for are even greater. The lack of self esteem leaves these students at high risk for substance abuse, early drop-out, low grades, etc. This is not designed to cure or treat family problems; it is designed to help provide a more successful school experience.

The school can provide some consistency and support through an ongoing program where the child can focus on his/her needs and how to identify them. These are needs for all children, this is a program that is based on what all children need but in a more comprehensive form to address specific issues such as: Who am I? What is anger? How do I solve my own problems? What do I do to take care of myself?
These are just a few areas to be covered.

ACTIVITY 1

Support groups must build a sense of safety and caring for participants. Safety in the beginning must be established through an overall understanding by the students of confidentiality. This will be done by developing a "code of conduct" for the group. Rules by which we will maintain the group. The students will make the "code of conduct." The facilitater may add areas the students might forget.

First brainstorm ideas - without discussion.

Then discuss what they mean - pro - con and specifics.

Then vote on the ones to keep.

Facilitater will want to include:

No put downs.

Contidentiality - what's said here stays here.

A statement on who attends.

The list ot rules should be printed and posted. It will then be referred to during group.

This list should include non-negotiables. Be on time.

Some students may need to discuss why they think they are in the group. Do this by having a go around and disclosing "what the hope will happen" in group.

EXAMPLE

RULES OF OUR GROUP

1. Only one person talks at a time.

2. Pay attention to the person who is talking. Don't interrupt.

3. Don't tell people outside the group about what someone else says in the group. We will keep each other's confidences.

4. Don't put each other down. Don't say things to each other in a way that tells somebody that he or she is dumb, stupid, crazy, or ugly. No teasing.

5. Nobody will make anybody talk. If someone chooses not to talk, that is okay.

6. If I choose not to talk, I will sit quietly and pay attention to others.

7. _____

8. _____

I agree to these rules.

_____
(sign your name here)

_____
(Date)

ACTIVITY 2

An activity to help you as the facilitater know the students better and also help them start to know the group. Poster people, give each child a poster size paper. Then have them fill in the poster.

3 things about me	3 things I like to do
symbol of me	
3 things that cause me pain	3 things I want to do

This activity should be done individually without talking. Once completed they may walk around (without talking) and read other people and notice the things they have in common with the posters. The posters should then be hung up around the room. The group facilitater should then save them and sometime later in the year return them. The facilitater should write some positives about the student - add four and five to each category. Give them back and ask the student if anything has changed.

Students need to identify a place for themselves in the family and in the school.

The manual is complete with 20 activities.